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Native Star Dance Team entertains MND-B Soldiers during Native American Heritage Month

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Kevin Lovel
363rd MPAD

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Haunting music emanated from a wooden flute at the onset of dusk, hearkening back to a more rustic and, perhaps purer, existence, setting the stage as Native American dancers from the Native Star Dance Team of New Mexico entertained Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers here Wednesday evening at the 4th Infantry Division’s Oasis Dining Facility.

The event honored not only Native American Soldiers, but Native Americans and Soldiers in general and the numerous contributions they have made in defense of their nation, said Nick Brokeshoulder, emcee and choreographer.

“A lot of them (dancers) have family members that have served or are currently serving in the military,” said Brokeshoulder, a retired Army veteran with more than 20 years of service as a field artilleryman and recruiter.

Brokeshoulder started the exhibition with prayer songs dedicated to all Soldiers and in honor of the memory of the first Native American Soldier killed during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

“These songs are a prayer for you and all that you do,” said Brokeshoulder.

At the conclusion of the prayer songs, the dance exhibition began with Nick’s son, Brent Brokeshoulder, who performed the “Fancy Prairie Chicken Dance,” followed by Nick’s wife, Sharon Brokeshoulder, performing a Native American sign language version of Lee Greenwood’s patriotic song, “God Bless the U.S.A.”

Summer Dawn Fuson then performed the “Southern and Northern Cloth Dance,” followed by Keely Etsitty, wearing an ornate “Jingle” dress, who captivated the audience with the intriguing “Prayer Dance for the Sick.”

Fuson then treated the audience to her second solo dance of the evening, “Women’s Fancy Dance,” followed by Sky Medicine Bear, performing “Men’s Fancy War Dance.”

MND-B Soldiers applauded frequently throughout the exhibition, and some remarked on how much they enjoyed attending it.

“I love it. I think it’s great that they’re doing this for the military” said Sgt. Frankie Albert, signal operator maintainer, Company A, Extension Detachment, Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, who hails from Gallup, N.M.

“It reminds me of home and the ceremonies we do there,” said Spc. Cassandra Morris, signal operator maintainer, Co. A., who hails from Muskogee Creek Reservation, Fla.

The 4th Inf. Div. equal opportunity office has worked diligently throughout the entire deployment to honor and celebrate the contributions of the many diverse populations within the Army.

“We’ve been trying to acknowledge each ethnic group,” said Sgt. 1st Class Ola Clark, human resources and equal opportunity specialist, Division Troops Company, STB, 4th Inf. Div., who hails from Monroe, La. “This is our opportunity to do something for the Native American Soldiers.”

The performing group said they had a lot of personal satisfaction from meeting and talking with deployed Native American Soldiers, said Brokesoulder.

The most satisfying experience during their tour here, which has included stops at Camp Virginia, Kuwait, and Camp Adder, Iraq, was being able to recognize Native American Soldiers from the New Mexico National Guard for their hard work and sacrifice shortly before they left Camp Adder to travel home at the end of their deployment, said Brokesoulder.

Following the exhibition, dancers graciously remained, making themselves available for photos and autographs and talking with Soldiers.



Fancy Prairie Chicken.

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Brent Brokeshoulder, Native Star Dance Team of N.M., performs the Fancy Prairie Chicken Dance as his father, Nick Brokeshoulder, emcee and choreographer, looks on at 4th Infantry Division's Oasis Dining Facility here Wednesday. The team performed numerous Native American dances for Soldiers from Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Lovel, 363rd MPAD)



Etsitty & Fuson.

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Keely Etsitty (left), and Summer Dawn Fuson, Native Star Dance Team of N.M., entertain Soldiers from Multi-National Division – Baghdad, at the 4th Infantry Division’s Oasis Dining Facility here Wednesday with an authentic Native American dance.

(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Lovel, 363rd MPAD)



Fancy war dance.

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Sky Medicine Bear, Native Star Dance Team of New Mexico, entertains diners at 4th Infantry Division's Oasis Dining Facility with his rendition of Men's Fancy War Dance here Thursday. The team performed numerous Native American dances for Soldiers from Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Lovel, 363rd MPAD)



Prayer song.

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Nick Brokeshoulder, emcee and choreographer, Native Star Dance Team of New Mexico, starts off the dance exhibition with a Native American prayer song for Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers assembled at the 4th Infantry Division Oasis Dining Facility here Wednesday. "These songs are a prayer for you and all that you do," said Brokeshoulder.

(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Lovel, 363rd MPAD)



Native American Sign Language.

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Sharon Brokeshoulder, Native Star Dance Team of New Mexico, performs a Native American sign language version of Lee Greenwood's song, "God Bless the U.S.A.," for the crowd assembled at the 4th Infantry Division Oasis Dining Facility here Wednesday.

(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Lovel, 363rd MPAD)